

Subject: Peruvian coinage

Holstein, Otto

1926-1927

[Trujillo, Peru]

Howland Wood

front tab, original folder

Holstein, Otto

1927

December 20, 1926

Mr. Otto Holstein,
Casilla 155,
Trujillo, Peru

Dear Sir:

Our mutual friend, Mr. Drowne, handed me the other day the Peruvian two-centavo and one-centavo pieces together with the two two-centavo pieces cut in half, as being the most appropriate place to have these. We are very much pleased to get these, as I myself, as well as the Museum have specialized on cut and counter stamped coins.

I did not know that pieces were being cut in half for small change at this present day. We would always appreciate receiving oddities like this or any new types of money, tokens or pieces in add materials that might be used as money.

Thanking you for this gift, I beg to remain

Very truly yours,

Curator

HW:MB

Casilla 155, Trujillo, Perú, S. A., Jan. 4, 1927.

My dear Mr. Wood:

I have your very kind letter of the 20th ultimo and I also had the pleasure of receiving a letter from our good friend, Mr. Henry Russell Drowne, in the mail from the SANTA LUISA yesterday.

I am happy to know that you were pleased with the Peruvian two-centavo pieces cut in half and it occurs to me that you might like to have a number of these pieces so I shall save them as they come back to me in the form of change and shall send you a number of these pieces at a later date, when I shall have gotten a sufficient number together. About the only thing either the two-centavo pieces or these improvised 1-centavo pieces are good for are to give to the beggars who "pester" the life out of us every Saturday. There is little or no effort on the part of any of the municipal or department authorities to alleviate the condition of the poor nor, in fact, is much help needed since there is no bitter poverty here as in some places I have lived. Where the banana grows no one goes hungry! Besides, to stop begging would be to take away a great deal of fun from a certain class of people for there appears to be no shame attached to it here and both men and women through some real or fancied injury graduate into the beggar class with the greatest glee and one usually finds them laughing and joking when they are about on their begging tours. They have certain days for the different sections of the town and my particular establishment catches them on Saturdays. This is a wide detour but it all comes back to the fact that about all one can do with the two and one cent pieces is to save them for the beggars.

You probably know that local currency here is no longer silver, the Soles and half Soles are coined of a mixture that is quite low in silver and the subsidiary coins are of nickel. They are all made at the Philadelphia Mint. Occasionally a silver Sol, 50-centavo piece, Peseta or a Real comes through but these are usually grabbed up in the Sierra where they are used for making silver objects. I have seen Soles here in the old days with Chinese "chop" marks on them showing that they have been to China and back.

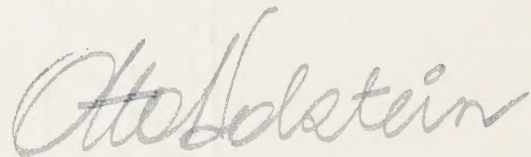
I wrote Mr. Drowne some time ago regarding the money I found in circulation in the Philippine Islands when I first went there in the early days. Of silver was to be seen Mexican Pesos, Guatemalan, Spanish, Colombian, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Chilean, Chinese moneys and many other pieces. Of copper coins there were Singapore, Hongkong, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, British North Borneo, Labuan and dozens of other pieces, much of the silver was marked up with Chinese chop marks and I once saw a Mexican peso with the Guatemalan coat-of-arms stamped thereon and half a dozen Chinese chop-marks.

As to the circulation of these cut two-centavo pieces, you may be certain that they are in current use and circulate freely hereabout. A coin with a hole in it is also current and the fact that a ten or twenty-centavo piece has done several years duty as a watch-fob or a bangle for a necklace, suspended from a shoe-string does not bar it from going back to work as currency again when the owner becomes hard-up and has to dispose of it so that probably one out of every twenty or thirty ten and twenty-centavo pieces (the silver ones - I don't recall ever having seen a nickel coin so defaced) will be found with a hole in it near the edge.

I will keep my eyes open for any oddities in this line and will send you anything that happens to strike my attention as being of interest to you and will send you the cut two-centavo pieces very shortly.

With kindest regards, I am,

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Otto Holstein". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Otto Holstein.

Howland Wood, Esq.,
Curator,
The American Numismatic Society,
Broadway between 155th and 156th Sts.,
New York City, U. S. A.

March 10, 1927

Mr. Otto Holstein,
Casilla 155,
Trujillo, Peru, S. A.

Dear Sir:

I have been meaning to write to you ever since I received your letter of January 4th. I sent parts of it to our coin magazine, "The Numismatist", as I thought what you had to say about the current coins would be of general interest. In fact, Mr. F. D. Langenheim, in behalf of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia, has written me if I could get for the Society two or three examples of ^{the} cut two-centavo pieces you sent on to us.

I note in your letter that you say you are saving some of these for us. One of the difficulties of getting a comprehensive collection of coins is the lack of knowledge and facilities of getting new issues and oddities. The stamp business is so systematized that one can almost keep up to the minute with every country but no dealer in coins pays much attention to new issues and the small coins. They concentrate on the rare and expensive pieces. One of our members lives in the Philippines. From letters received from him, I should judge that today the situation is changed greatly from the time when you were there, as his diggings seem to be very meagre. I beg to remain

Very truly yours,

Curator

HW:MB

Trujillo, Perú, S. A., March 30, 1927.

Howland Wood, Esq.,
American Numismatic Society,
New York City, U. S. A.

Dear Mr. Wood:

Your letter of the 10th instant reached me in Monday's mail and as the ESSEQUIBO sails for New York tomorrow and calls at Salaverry I shall take advantage of the opportunity to send along a few of the "split" two-centavo pieces I happen to have. The 2-centavo piece is known locally as "un gordo", gordo being Spanish for fat, a fat man is un hombre gordo or simply un gordo while a fat woman is either una mujer gorda or simply una gorda so the 2-centavo piece becomes a fat, applied, probably, owing to the thickness of the piece.

I have a Chinese merchant and several others saving up all the split gordos they get and will be able to send you quite a mess of them shortly or I may hold them 'till I come back in June and call and pay my respects to you in person and hand the coins to you.

I'm mailing this letter with a trick often used down here, it may have some interest for you and if you will note the stamps (assuming someone doesn't "feel" the pieces in the envelope and "delete" the letter in the hope that it contains something of value for down here there are no assurances that letters will find their destination.

The condition I spoke of as obtaining in the Philippines was away back in the "old days", over twenty years ago, when the United States Government provided a currency for the Islands known as "conant" (from a specialist who studied the monetary situation in the Islands whose name, if I am not mistaken, was Conant). After "conant" was introduced the Provincial Treasurers had instructions to buy up all the other coins in the Provinces and send them to Manila, it was back before the new currency came in that you would exchange a Mexican silver peso with a Guatemalan coat-of-arms stamped on it showing that it had done service in Guatemala as well as México and then a dozen or so "chop marks" of Chinese Tongs, Banks and the like and would get in return Chinese silver from all the Chinese provinces, Japanese coins, Singapore Dollars, Hongkong Dollars and copper from everywhere. A collector would have been in clover over there in those days.

With kind regards I am,

Very truly yours,

Otto Holstein
Otto Holstein.